

A daytime train from Quebec City to New Carlisle, not before the end of 2026

GILLES GAGNÉ

MARIA – Reading between the lines of statements made by VIA Rail President and Chief Executive Officer Mathieu Paquette, the return of passenger rail service to the Gaspé Peninsula could connect Quebec City and the region as far as New Carlisle, even though the track is usable as far as Port-Daniel-Gascons. Moreover, the service will not return in 2026.

During a three-day visit to the Gaspé Peninsula, Mr. Paquette held numerous meetings with regional railway representatives, elected officials and Micheline Saint-Onge, spokesperson for the Coalition of Gaspesians for the Return of a Passenger Train.

In an interview with SPEC, Mr. Paquette expressed reservations about the train service returning east of Matapédia before 2027. He also indicated a preference for an initial return to New Carlisle and specified that the connection could be established from Quebec City using a daytime train.

The train assigned to the Gaspé Peninsula service, which VIA Rail suspended in September 2013 due to the state of the railway infrastructure, operated overnight between Montreal and



Photos: Gilles Gagné

The VIA Rail delegation, composed of Denis Boucher, Laurence Lefrançois, Carl Delisle, and Mathieu Paquette, was welcomed by Éric Dubé, president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, and Mathieu Lapointe, president of the Gaspé Prefects' Table.

Matapédia.

There are nearly eight months left before the end of 2026, but Mathieu Paquette believes that timeframe is insufficient to resume a service suspended 13 years ago.

“No, no. I want to manage expectations properly. I’ll give you an example. First of all, we are dependent on certain factors over which we have no control; in particular, we need to secure the use of the tracks with the Quebec Ministry of Transport. If we wanted to implement a daytime service between Quebec City, regardless of the (region’s) last stop, we would also need to have dis-

cussions with Canadian National, which owns the tracks. That takes time. So, to be perfectly clear, it’s not something that’s possible before the end of 2026,” he says.

Transports Québec owns the rail network between Gaspé and Matapédia. Canadian National (CN) owns the Matapédia-Quebec City line.

Mathieu Paquette also noted that the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), a municipally controlled company that transports freight between Matapédia and Port-Daniel, needs to carry out work to improve certain stations and, especially, the passenger boarding platforms. Those stations belong to the SCFG.

“I want people to understand that we often greet customers who have disabilities or reduced mobility. They must be able to board with their wheelchairs,” he adds.

Furthermore, while waiting for the section between Port-Daniel and Gaspé to be reopened, he wants related services to be provided in conjunction with the train.

“If, for example, the train stopped in New Carlisle, we can’t just drop people off there and tell them to fend for themselves! What we’ve done, based on the discussions we just had with the Prefects’

Table, is to say, well, if the train arrives in New Carlisle, people can get off, and there could be a bus service that allows them to continue their journey to Chandler, Percé, or Gaspé. So, it goes beyond simply getting people on and off the train,” he explains.

From December 2011 to the summer of 2013, the passenger train stopped in New Carlisle because repairs were underway in Chandler, and a bus service was available to Gaspé, in collaboration with VIA Rail.

A mid-summer plan

During the tenure of Mario Pélouquin, Mathieu Paquette's predecessor, the availability of rolling stock was one of the obstacles cited by VIA Rail to delay its return to the Gaspé Peninsula. The need for Transports Québec to repair the network as far as Gaspé was also mentioned.

“We have rolling stock. We are certainly looking at potentially introducing the service gradually. This is likely to evolve. In the short term, what will the service be like, what type of equipment will we put into service? Everything is not finalized. So, we are starting from here, and that is precisely what we will focus on. And our goal is to return by

mid-summer, to contact regional stakeholders again and share the plan we have developed,” he further explains.

This work plan will be flexible, and the public carrier will be open to suggestions from Gaspé residents, he says. While he doesn't set a date for the train's return, Mathieu Paquette assures that it won't take 10 years.

“We're not going to wait for everything to be perfect. One message that people need to hear, and we'll keep pushing, is that for us, the ultimate goal will always be to reach Gaspé, as it was before. We're ready to consider a gradual return, but our fear is that the repairs on the final section will never get done. I think the Gaspé Peninsula deserves a passenger service that goes all the way to its destination,” says the president of VIA Rail.

Port-Daniel, unlikely on the first try

Mathieu Paquette expresses his preference for a return to New Carlisle first, even though the railway line is operational as far as Port-Daniel, 30 kilometres farther east.

“In the short term, I would say we’re looking at New Carlisle because we can turn the train around. The problem is that with the type of equipment we’ll be using, there won’t be a locomotive at the front and at the rear,” he points out.

Executives of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie are offering VIA Rail the use of one of their locomotives to bring the train back from Port-Daniel to New Carlisle.

“That’s one of the things we’re going to discuss with them. What I can tell you is that, as far as we know, we haven’t had those discussions yet. So, for now, we’re looking at New Carlisle, where the necessary infrastructure for returning trains exists,” emphasizes the president of VIA Rail. *See article on Page 6.*



The village of Matapédia is currently the only VIA Rail stop in the Gaspé Peninsula administrative region. This train connects Montreal to Halifax.